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CENTS**S P E C T A T O R**

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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	Page
FROM THE EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR . . .	3
THE NEW YORK SPECTACLE, . . .	14
REVIEWS BY THE EDITOR	
Klondike Annie	5
Little Lord Fauntleroy	5
These Three	6
The Trail of the Lonesome Pine	6
The Prisoner of Shark Island	7
Wife Versus Secretary	8
Gentle Julia	9
Marie Chapdelaine	10
The Leathernecks Have Landed	11
Love Before Breakfast	11
REVIEWS BY ALLAN HERSHOLT	
Men Without Love	12
Road Gang	12
Boulder Dam	13
Desert Gold	13

Excuse Us, Please:

You are invited to the SPECTATOR's *Tenth Birthday Party*.

But there's a catch in it. You can't come unless you bring a gift. And to keep Mrs. Doakes from sneering at Mrs. Doe's gift, we're making it uniform, the same gift from all who attend.

For no reason other than their need for money, film trade papers seize upon any kind of an anniversary as an excuse for holding up the film personnel. The habit has become so fixed that the personnel responds to no appeal based on a better reason for advertising.

Next month the SPECTATOR will be ten years old. That offers us a rare excuse for plundering the coffers of film people.

But to make it as painless as possible we will refuse to sell more than one-quarter page of space to any one victim. That—price, \$35—is as far as our elastic conscience will stretch.

And that is a pretty good stretch because the advertising won't do a bit of good to those who buy it. We hope there will be a whole lot of quarter pages, but they will look so much alike they will attract no individual attention.

Of course, they will attract our attention, but even that will not do the party guests any good, for during ten years the SPECTATOR has said only what it thinks, and revenue from advertising cannot affect its thoughts.

So, while we hope you will buy a place at one of the tables set for four, for the life of us we can't see why you should—unless, of course, you think the SPECTATOR serves a useful purpose and feel like giving it support.

Come to think of it, that is not such a bad reason.

Don't send any money. We will mail you a bill after publication. Merely telephone—GLadstone 5213—and we will reserve a place for you.

This is your invitation.

R. S. V. P.



From the

Editor's Easy Chair



Now Let There Be Peace

THE making permanent of William Le Baron's appointment as production head at Paramount was a wise move on the part of President John E. Otterson.

During the past year the quality of Paramount's production has been lower than that of any other period in its existence. The recent shake-up in the organization threw the lot into confusion, and no one on the payroll felt secure.

Bill Le Baron has the respect of everyone on the lot. He is popular. He has loyalty for those who are loyal to the company for which they work. He has no axe to grind. He did not seek the job. It sought him. But he has the ability to serve it well.

A good administrator, a keen judge of entertainment values, an experienced producer with a long line of successes to his credit, Bill Le Baron is an admirable choice for this job of vast importance.

Now let the lot settle down to business and give us some good pictures. Unrest is over. Jobs are safe.

Hugh and Cry

MY GOOD friend F. Hugh Herbert, writes me again. TWO SPECTATORS ago I confessed my inability to debate with him on a premise advanced by him and which I consider too untenable to form even a basis for argument. The inspiration for his onslaught was my own postulate that all arts are governed by inflexible laws, and he challenged me to name even one art that was governed by even one law. Now Hugh writes me again:

You are a great disappointment to me. I looked forward with masochistic eagerness to a fine flagellation in your columns, and all I can find is the mendicant whine of a feeble debater who begs the question interminably and rather stupidly. I don't quite know why I should waste any more of my time—or rather, to be honest, Warner Bros.' time—in attempting to teach you the fundamentals of common sense, but it is a rainy afternoon, and I'm not going to give you more than a couple of minutes anyhow.

The trouble with you, my dear Welford, is that you have evidently not bothered to refer to your dictionary for the definition of the word "law." You state again inanelly and also redundantly that traffic laws are flexible. I submit that they are nothing of the sort. They state, for instance, that the speed limit along a certain highway is forty-five miles per hour. That is a specific, inflexible, rigid figure. That is the law. Now Traffic Officer Doakes, charged with the en-

forcement of that law, can interpret it according to his venality.

I challenged you to quote me one equally specific law applied to any one art. You answer this challenge by the feeble-minded comment that: "We cannot argue a round window into being oblong." I am no architect, but if you can show me any recognized law of that art which specifically designates the shape of windows, I will cheerfully buy ten subscriptions to the SPECTATOR.

"The laws of art are inflexible and rigid and from them there is no appeal." Bosh, my dear Welford—and you know it! "The preservation of harmony, rhythm and composition is the inviolable law of all arts." Of course it is—but you could go a long way before finding a generalization more vague or less axiomatic. Briefly, you haven't successfully refuted a single one of my arguments, and if you are honest, you'll admit it.

As far as I can make Hugh out, it is our different interpretations of the word "law" that splits our opinions. Apparently he regards a law as "an obligatory rule of action prescribed by supreme power in a state," as my dictionary puts it. But my dictionary has more than two whole pages devoted to the word. I find these definitions: "A known or recognized rule of action; a specified method of procedure; a rule of order or progress; a rule established by custom or precedent." Among the many synonyms given is "principle." I accept Hugh's challenge to consult my dictionary, which I submit as a witness on my behalf.

If all objects of art are produced without a rule of order or progress, without a rule established by custom or precedent, then my witness is untrue and the verdict is in favor of Hugh. But my witness itself is a law, the law which governs the spelling of words. We can repeat or amend a traffic law; the dictionary's law is inflexible.

Hugh says the legal speed limit is forty-five miles an hour, "a specific, inflexible, rigid figure." The courts of California have ruled that the traffic law is not inflexible, rigid, that safe driving is its only command and that forty-five miles is suggested as a safe driving speed, but it is not made mandatory. Such was the ruling in the case of Francis Lederer when he was charged with driving in excess of forty-five miles an hour.

I still maintain Hugh is a tough customer to argue with, as tough as the one who looks into a clear sky at noon and starts an argument with "The sun is not shining today."

A reader who caught one of the previews of Colleen takes me to task for what she calls my unfair criticism of the performances of Louise Fazenda and Hugh Herbert.

She claims their comedy added greatly to the entertainment quality of the picture and that their performances were excellent. I quite agree with her estimate of the quality of the two performances. Miss Fazenda and Herbert are skilled artists and it was the very excellence of their work in *Colleen* which led me to suggest in my review that some of their scenes should be eliminated in the final cutting. They were so funny they drew attention from the story, to which their comedy added nothing. I do not favor extraneous interpolations in pictures, adhering to the belief that the sole mission of a story is to tell itself without interruptions, no matter how entertaining such interruptions may be on their own account. The SPECTATOR rarely indulges in personal comment, but I feel impelled to state now that Louise Fazenda is not only a grand actress, but is as well a grand woman who for years has done a great deal for many people less fortunate than herself. The spirit behind her benefactions is such that she probably will get mad at me when she reads this reference to them.

* * *

The screen and the stage do not share the same necessity for meticulous enunciation in the reading of lines. Voice projection is not an element of screen dialogue. The camera moves so close to characters on the screen we can follow intimate conversations without conscious effort to catch every word. As a matter of fact, in such conversations our ears function to catch only the key words, only those essential to our understanding what is said. We do not really hear the thes, ands and buts. When we are addressed by a man at a considerable distance from us, he must enunciate each word distinctly to convey his meaning to us. When you say to your wife at your side "The key is under the doormat," she really hears only "key" and "doormat," but if you shout the message from a distance, you stress each word to make your meaning clear. The stage player must stress each word to carry his meaning to the top gallery, but the screen player is under no such obligation. His hearer is at his side and the microphone attends to the fellow in the top gallery. Thus screen conversations lose their naturalness in the degree they adopt stage diction. Training in stage technique will unmake more screen players than it will make.

* * *

As long as our motion pictures devote so much footage to the spoken word, they might as well go all the way and occasionally strive to develop some of the beauty of our language. It is seldom a picture gives us a speech worth listening to on its own account and apart from its contribution to the story. It is not so much what Shakespeare says as it is his beautiful way of saying it that has made him the world's first dramatist. His speech is music. These thoughts came to me as I sat through *Rose Marie*, the glorious scenery of which could have been matched by one or two speeches as poetic in content as the scenes are rich in poetic suggestion. And I hope in such future Shakespearean productions as we have on the screen, care will be taken to develop the musical possibilities of the Bard of Avon's lines. The only fault I could find with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the effort expended to give conversational expression to the dialogue, technique appropriate to dialogue written as conversations, but inappropriate to the lilting quality of the Shakespearean

lines. Whenever we have language in itself entertaining, its entertaining quality should receive first consideration in its delivery.

* * *

Efforts to bolster attendance at film theatres by sprinkling vaudeville acts through screen programs is not proving successful, according to Don Carle Gillette in *Film Daily*. It always has been my contention that an audience seeking motion picture entertainment never will be satisfied with anything else. It is sad commentary on Hollywood's brand of such entertainment that old fashioned vaudeville is resorted to by exhibitors to fill seats which our motion pictures leave empty. The trouble with Hollywood is that it thinks in false entertainment terms, that it is concerned more with its material than with its medium. It runs to star names, biographies, classics, spectacles—anything except the thing that made it great: the ability of the camera to tell a story with a flow of moving pictorial impressions. For the flow of motion which was responsible for the most spectacular industrial success in the history of the world, Hollywood has substituted the spoken word which the stage, in the twenty-five centuries of its existence, did not succeed in making industrially important. It is hard to believe, but there it is!

* * *

Again we hear rumblings of the advent of another series of Mr. and Mrs. pictures patterned after those in which Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew appeared some years ago, a series which proved to be an outstanding success. I believe the fact that the two leading players really were man and wife was a strong factor in making the pictures so popular. I know it was what created my own interest in them. And since the passing of Sidney Drew, no other man and woman teamed in pictures along the same line have proven successful. I have a feeling that no series will duplicate the Drew success unless it shows us a married couple playing the married couple. I can see only one promising couple on the horizon, Mr. and Mrs. Gene Lockhart. To me they are ideal for the parts, just the right age, both pleasant to look at and each a skilled performer. They have appeared together in many plays as Kathleen and Gene Lockhart—or it may be the other way around—but in a domestic series I believe the box-office appeal would be greater if they were billed as Mr. and Mrs.

* * *

Fourteen years ago Henry Blanke came to Hollywood as cutter for the pictures Ernst Lubitsch directed for Warner Brothers. He has been with the Warners ever since and last week his value to the organization was recognized by the extension of his contract for a term of years. Henry is a retiring little fellow, but there are not a dozen others in the entire film world who have his comprehensive grasp of the fundamentals of screen entertainment. Current pictures supervised by him and which reflect his ability as a producer, are *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, *The Petrified Forest*, all among the great productions now showing. And soon he will give us *Anthony Adverse* and *Green Pastures*, as well as *The Life of Beethoven* and some others now preparing. His record is an extraordinary one.

* * *

Don't overlook reading about the SPECTATOR's *Tenth Birthday Party*. Page 2.

Reviews by the Editor

Disgraceful and Nauseating

KLONDIKE ANNIE, Paramount. Directed by Raoul Walsh; assistant director, David MacDonald; from a play by Mae West, and a story by Marion Morgan and George B. Dowell; material suggested by Frank Mitchell; screen play and dialogue by Mae West; film editor, Stuart Heisler; art directors, Hans Dreier and Bernard Herzbrun. Cast: Mae West, Victor McLaglen, Phillip Reed, Harold Huber, Soo Yong, Lucille Webster Gleason, Helen Jerome Eddy, Tetsu Komai, James Burke, Harry Beresford, Conway Tearle.

ABOUT all that Mae West has contributed to the screen is tinselled vulgarity. We should be grateful to her, though, for more than any other individual is she responsible for the creation of the League of Decency which is responsible for the present satisfactory box-office conditions. Her latest picture, *Klondike Annie*, practically her own production as she wrote the story and bossed the rest of it, is not worth seeing but its career will be well worth watching. If Paramount is foolish enough to release it generally, it is going to be met with an uproar of protest by all the organizations which stand for good taste and decency in screen entertainment.

In the picture, Mae West plays Frisco Doll. We see her first as the kept woman of a Chinaman whom she kills by stabbing him in the back. Fleeing from the law, she takes passage on a boat bound for Nome. Another passenger is a religious worker garbed in a uniform resembling that of the Salvation Army. She dies. The Doll changes clothes with the corpse and makes up the face of the devout woman to resemble a professional prostitute. She pokes a cigarette between the dead lips of the decent woman. Mind you, you see this being done, if your stomach's appeal to your eyes to close themselves is not too strong to be resisted. The officers pursuing her think the corpse is the Doll, and, in her false raiment the erstwhile prostitute of the Chinaman becomes a religious worker.

The whole thing reveals the functioning of a foul mind at the peak of its odor. It is a horrible picture, a revolting one, a disgrace not only to Paramount but to the entire film industry. And it bears the purity seal of the Hays organization.

Dave Does Himself Proud

LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY, United Artists release of Selznick International production. Stars Freddie Bartholomew. Directed by John Cromwell; screen play by Hugh Walpole; from play by Frances Hodgson Burnett; photographed by Charles Rosher; special effects by Jack Cosgrove and Virgil Miller; musical score, Max Steiner; art director, Sturges Carne; associate, Casey Roberts; wardrobe, Sophie Wachner; assistant directors, Eric Stacey and Robert Stillman. Supporting cast: Dolores Costello Barrymore, C. Aubrey Smith, Guy Kibbee, Henry Stephenson, Mickey Rooney, Constance Collier, E. E. Clive, Una O'Connor, Jackie Searl, Jessie Ralph, Ivan Simpson, Helen Flint, Eric Alden, May Beatty, Virginia Field, Reginald Barlow, Lionel Belmore, Tempe Pigott, Gilbert Emery, Lawrence Grant, Walter Kingsford, Eily Malyon, Fred Walton, Robert Emmett O'Connor, Elsa Buchanan.

DAVE SELZNICK gives us another notable picture, notable alike for its good taste, human atmosphere, capable direction, appropriate production and understanding acting. While I do not agree the script is the best that could be written from the book, I grant it is quite good enough to permit John Cromwell to give us a picture which should satisfy audiences throughout the world.

The story of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is classic hokum. It is all sentiment, its goodness dripping with virtue and its badness yielding to virtue triumphant. If the story had no classic background and had been submitted to a Hollywood producer as an original, its progress toward the screen would have come to an abrupt stop at the desk of the first reader who scanned it. But it has become a classic, so it comes to the screen and will do big business at the box-office.

And why will it do big business at the box-office? Because the public knows when it views the picture it is going to get one of the biggest doses of hokum ever crammed into a feature length film. It is hokum, as we use the word in Hollywood, which made the book popular and makes its title of box-office value to picture houses. If picture producers would give the public fewer social problems, less sophisticated arguing, and more warmly human hokum of the *Fauntleroy* type, they would please a larger audience. It is not the title of the Burnett book in itself which will attract the public; it is the promise the title gives of a full dose of human sentiment. And the book has no corner on such sentiment. It can be written into original screen stories as easily as it can be found between the covers of books.

I was familiar with every turn the *Fauntleroy* story was going to take, yet never for a moment did my interest in it lag. I lived again the effect it produced when I read it in my youth; it stirred my emotions as it did then. I loved Dearest all over again, glowed with pleasure over Ceddie's conquest of the old Earl, and wanted to hiss the brazen mother of the false claimant to the earldom. My only regret was Dave's failure to show us Ceddie's joy when he went to the stables and met his pony. I remember the pony, but was denied the pleasure of meeting him again.

John Cromwell gives the sentimental story sympathetic direction, developing its sentimental qualities unblushingly but without becoming mawkish. He makes Freddie Bartholomew a regular boy, a little he-man who glories in a rough-and-tumble fight and is equally frank in parading his great love for his mother, and his friendship for the grocer, the apple woman and the bootblack. No happier choice for a leading role could have been made.

It was a generous, graceful gesture Dave Selznick made in providing Dolores Costello with an opportunity to return to the screen under such auspicious circumstances. The intervening years have robbed her of none of her beauty nor have they lessened the appeal of her personality or the convincing quality of her acting.

Aubrey Smith, as the Earl of Dorincourt, gives us a really remarkable characterization, a finely shaded performance which ranks as the best he has contributed to the screen. Henry Stephenson, another veteran who never disappoints, is well cast. Guy Kibbee, Mickey Rooney, Jessie Ralph, Helen Flint, Ivan Simpson, are others who stand out in the long and capable cast.

The Selznick art department gives the story a setting which preserves admirably the English atmosphere, and

Charles Rosher's camera does it full justice. I am glad the picture was made before the advent of the color debacle which Hollywood seems destined to indulge in as a result of the showing of *Lonesome Pine*.

Another Goldwyn Triumph

THESE THREE, a Samuel Goldwyn production for United Artists release. Original story and screen play by Lillian Hellman; directed by William Wyler; art direction, Richard Day; musical direction, Alfred Newman; photography, Gregg Toland, A.S.C.; costumes, Omar Kiam; film editor, Daniel Mandell; sound recorder, Frank Maher; assistant director, Walter Mayo. Cast: Miriam Hopkins, Merle Oberon, Joel McCrea, Catharine Doucet, Alma Kruger, Bonita Granville, Marcia Mae Jones, Carmencita Johnson, Mary Louise Cooper, Mary Ann Durkin, Margaret Hamilton, Walter Brennan.

MEMORY fails to bring to my mental screen another Sam Goldwyn picture which for sheer brilliancy of production matches *These Three*. It must be all of eight or nine years since the SPECTATOR first drew attention to a German youth, a Laemmle relative, who was directing unimportant pictures on the Universal lot. There was something in Willie Wyler's work which prompted me to write on several occasions that some day he would do things in a big way. He is William Wyler now. He directed *These Three*, and if there is another director who could have made a better job of it, I do not know his name.

Willie's greatest achievement in handling the Goldwyn production is his direction of two children in his cast, Bonita Granville and Monica Mae Jones. Bonita, in particular, and because her role permits it, fairly astounds the audience with the depth of her performance; but Monica is equally successful in developing all the values of her less prominent role. They are a pair of spectacularly talented youngsters, nevertheless it was great direction that was responsible for the brilliancy of their performances.

The *These Three* story deals with the cruel power of malicious gossip. Lies, not even based on a shred of truth, play havoc with the spiritual and material welfare of Miriam Hopkins, Merle Oberon and Joel McCrea. That is the story. A trifle too much footage is used in its telling. During the showing I uncrossed and recrossed my legs two or three times, and when I do that it is because my interest in the screen is lagging. But in this instance the lagging was of short duration.

To those interested in the screen as a medium, *These Three* will appeal principally by virtue of its excellence as an example of screen craftsmanship. Students of motion picture appreciation will find it a profitable subject for study. It is a talkie, of course, but it leans heavily on the camera as a story-telling aid. The dialogue is businesslike; it confines itself to telling the story in the fewest possible words, and is delivered without the distracting element of stage declamation. Only the children raise their voices, and they do it only when the hysterical nature of scenes demands it.

There are five adult performances which will give an intelligent audience that complete satisfaction which only perfection bestows on its beholder. In the order of their billing the artists are Miriam Hopkins, Merle Oberon, Joel McCrea, Catharine Doucet and Alma Kruger. Margaret Hamilton and Walter Brennan display equal ability in minor parts. And there are several children besides the two I mention who, in the little they have to do,

maintain the acting excellence of the production.

With uncanny ability the director has woven the various characterizations into an even pattern until it is their very interdependence which gives the performances their individual strength. Merle Oberon heightens the favorable impression she made in *Dark Angel*. Joel McCrea is coming along with giant strides. Unhampered by the stilted influence of definite technique, his naturalness is unhampered in its expression. No other young actor on the screen displays greater promise of a more brilliant career in pictures.

Alma Kruger in a grande dame role gives an interesting performance in her first screen appearance, adapting herself to the new medium without revealing traces of her stage training.

The screen play of Lillian Hellman is a flawless piece of talkie writing. Gregg Toland's photography is an outstanding demonstration of the camera at the peak of its artistic power. All Goldwyn pictures are mounted handsomely and in this one Richard Day's impressive sets maintain the high Goldwyn standard.

These Three is a triumph for William Wyler and establishes his right to consideration as one of the screen's most able directors.

Coloring the Lonesome Pine

THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE, Walter Wanger production for Paramount release. directed by Henry Hathaway; screen play by Grover Jones; original by John Fox, Jr.; adaptation by Harvey Thew and Horace McCoy; settings in color designed and executed by Alexander Toluboff; musical direction, Boris Morros; director of photography, Robert C. Bruce; film editor, Robert Bischoff; recorded by Hugo Grenzbach; assistant director, Richard Talmadge; technicolor photography, Howard Greene; technicolor color director, Natalie Kalmus. Cast: Sylvia Sydney, Henry Fonda, Fred MacMurray, Fred Stone, Nigel Bruce, Beulah Bondi, Robert Barrat, Spanky McFarland, Fuzzy Knight, Otto Fries, Samuel Hinds, Alan Baxter, Fern Emmett, Richard Carle, Henry Kleinbach, Phillip Barker, Robert Kortman.

TECHNICOLOR displays here its supreme achievement. The film opens with some of the most exquisitely beautiful pictures ever to adorn the screen. They were greeted with applause by the preview audience which filled the theatre. Later in the picture some scenes even more beautiful crossed the screen without provoking applause. That about sums up the story of color in feature pictures. The audience's capacity for absorbing its beauty, for reacting to its esthetic appeal, was satiated before the film had half run its course. Then it became a distraction.

I went to *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* with an open mind. For years I have been expressing myself as opposed to the use of color except in short subjects. I joined in the applause which greeted the first shots, for no one can deny their beauty. But I came away from the preview more than ever convinced that color photography has no place in feature pictures. The near approach to natural coloring which Technicolor has attained is the very thing that makes its use unwise.

The mission of art is to interpret nature, not to reproduce it. On all sides of us nature presents pictures which we scarcely glance at, yet we are willing to reward handsomely the artists who interpret them on canvas. The elements of the medium in which the painter works are his blues, greens, browns, yellows. The elements of motion picture art are photography and moving compositions.

The essential quality of all art creations is harmony. Because an artist likes blue, he must not distract the harmony of his painting by using it too profusely. Because color can be made beautiful on the screen it must not be exploited at the expense of the other elements constituting a screen creation.

Harmony is distorted when one element of an art creation isolates itself and attracts attention as an individual contribution to the whole. Hollywood has at its command the greatest of all the arts, one recognized as such by leading thinkers all over the world, yet those who work in this outstanding medium, constantly, persistently seek means of distorting it, of outraging it by the introduction of elements foreign to it. Color is screen art's greatest insult, one which only a third dimension could match. It took one hundred thousand extra dollars to provide *Lonesome Pine* with color, to add to it an element which violates the law of all arts that there should be no one element that attracts attention to itself.

* * *

The film industry would better serve the interests of its stockholders if it engaged its attention more with the spirit of its story material and less with a search for fanciful trimmings which have no story value.

The *Lonesome Pine* story possesses elements to hold the attention of an audience and a background which would lend itself to beautiful treatment in black and white photography. I could find no fault with the direction of Henry Hathaway nor with the joint literary effort of Grover Jones, Harvey Thew and Horace McCoy, yet I found the picture rather dull, which I attribute chiefly to the distraction of color.

I am sure it was color photography which spoiled for me the performance of Sylvia Sydney. Never has she looked less attractive on the screen. She plays an uncouth, uneducated female hillbilly, yet her rather unprepossessing mouth is rimmed with a profusion of lipstick which Technicolor reproduces with unkind fidelity. In an emotional scene, the peak of which reaches into screams, Sylvia is so unconvincing that even only a few of the studio contingent applauded. But it was not her fault. Her emotion was based on a premise which an audience will not accept under the circumstances of its presentation—a cry for more feud murders uttered by a girl after she had received some measure of education.

* * *

A sequence which makes the story drag is a long one showing a funeral of a boy victim of the feud. When we have a death we presume a funeral, consequently this sequence has no story significance. Its elimination would improve the picture.

If you are one of those who take an intelligent interest in the progress of the screen, you must see this picture. In it color was put on trial. The industry is waiting to see what the public will do with it. The public will flock to it. Exploitation of the color will attract audiences. If the industry can restrain its imitative impulse and allow Walter Wanger to give color one or two more trials, it will find that it would be wise for it to stick to black and white photography. Even Walter will return to it.

Nothing fundamentally unsound can persist in something fundamentally sound. Fundamentals have a way of taking care of themselves.

Praising with Faint Damns

THE PRISONER OF SHARK ISLAND, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by John Ford; Associate producer and screen play, Nunnally Johnson; photography, Bert Glennon, ASC; art direction, William Darling; settings by Thomas Little; assistant director, Ed O'Ferna; film editor, Jack Murray; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; sound, W. D. Flick, Roger Heman; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Warner Baxter, Gloria Stuart, Claude Gillingwater, Arthur Byron, O. P. Heggie, Harry Carey, Francis Ford, John McGuire, Francis McDonald, Douglas Wood, John Carradine, Joyce Kay, Fred Kohler, Jr., Ernest Whitman, Paul Fix, Frank Shannon, Frank McGlynn, Sr., Leila McIntyre, J. M. Kerrigan, Arthur Loft, Paul McVey, Maurice Murphy, Etta McDaniel.

WHEN Nunnally Johnson, Twentieth Century writer, began his task of writing a Doctor Mudd screen play for Nunnally Johnson, Twentieth Century associate producer, to make into a picture, he had only a few outstanding facts to go on: Dr. Mudd attended a stranger who turned out to be John Wilkes Booth, assassin of Lincoln; Mudd was convicted as an accomplice, sentenced to life imprisonment; he rendered heroic service during a yellow fever epidemic on the prison island, was pardoned. That is the complete story.

Writer Johnson could put all that in a two-reeler, but Producer Johnson wanted seven reels of story material, and padding is the only known process by which a lot of nothing can be made out of a little something. So we have in *The Prisoner of Shark Island* the two reels of story material plus five reels of padding, splendidly directed by John Ford, splendidly mounted by Twentieth Century and splendidly photographed by Bert Glennon. But all the splendor and the really excellent performances of Warner Baxter, Gloria Stuart and all the others of the carefully selected cast, do not conceal the fact of a lack of story content to support the production.

* * *

Johnson went grewsome in his effort to extend the screen play to feature length. He gives a long execution sequence which serves to inform us that Mudd was not hung, a negative bit of information which in no way affects the fate of the unfortunate doctor. A long escape sequence serves only to inform us that Mudd was unsuccessful in gaining his freedom, another negative contribution to the story. Considerable footage is devoted to the harsh treatment accorded the prisoner to gain for him the sympathy already gained in full measure by the fact of his unjust incarceration.

More footage is devoted to the abortive efforts of Mudd's family and friends to gain his freedom, all negative incidents which have no bearing on the story and serve only to keep the family and friends in the picture.

Mudd is pardoned finally solely because of his skill in stamping out the fever epidemic among the soldiers and prisoners on the island. Nothing shown in the preceding reels has any bearing on the application of his medical knowledge to the fever crisis. And nothing is shown to indicate the pardon cleared his name as one of the Lincoln conspirators. Apparently he left prison still condemned in the minds of the public as one of the murderers of the President.

The weakness of the Mudd story lies in the fact that it had no significance except to him and the members of his family. He cured some victims of the yellow fever, but he did not advance the world's knowledge of the disease. Nothing he did lived after him, as was the case with

Louis Pasteur, who bequeathed to the world medical knowledge which will benefit mankind for the rest of time. The Pasteur picture grips you during its entire showing; you take it away with you from the theatre and live it again. As you view the Mudd picture your attention is held by the pictorial effectiveness of the scenes, the superb photography, outstanding direction and skilled performances, but in retrospect you find the production gains its impressiveness solely from its bulk and not from a sustained spiritual quality comparable with that which makes the Pasteur film outstanding, and which all pictures must possess if they are to be wholly successful.

Toward the end we see Warner Baxter in bed convalescing from fever. He looks rested, healthy, his usual self. When we next see him, on the occasion of his return home, he is feeble, drawn, hollow-eyed. Apparently his pardon had a more debilitating effect upon him than his attack of fever. This closing sequence is too theatrical. Baxter strikes a dramatic pose at the gate; his faithful wife does not fly down the path and into his arms. His small daughter first advances, and finally the wife who gives us the impression she was waiting for the director's signal.

* * *

John Ford has no master in the art of making members of his cast give good performances. Warner Baxter never before reached such heights as he does in this picture, and Gloria Stuart displays histrionic ability never even hinted at before. Claude Gillingwater, as a lively old die-hard Southerner, is a tower of strength to the picture. Harry Carey is another who makes his performance outstanding among so many good ones. John Carradine, in the first big role I have seen him carry, presents an extraordinarily effective characterization.

Small parts and bits are enacted by players who respond as intelligently to Ford's direction as do those I mention. There is an evenness in the acting, a blending of characters that sets every player's place in the general pattern the director has woven. I noticed one young man I have been spotting before, Maurice Murphy, who strikes me as being an actor who is going to get somewhere.

Certainly the production is one of the most impressive to come from any studio in a long time. It is interesting, too, by virtue of its being supervised by the man who wrote the screen play. When we have perfectly made motion pictures writers will be making most of them. It was history's fault, not Nunnally Johnson's, that the life of Dr. Mudd supplied so little story material that he had to round it out with incidents only contemporary with it and with no direct bearing on it. The incidents were well written, well directed and well acted, which is all we can expect of them, but I hope when Darryl Zanuck again dips into history he will pick on some character whose activities on earth were more varied than those of the lamented Mudd.

The SPECTATOR is the only film paper published in Hollywood that is read and quoted by the trade and lay press in over ninety per cent of the countries in which motion pictures are made. Our collection of clippings shows SPECTATOR articles have been translated to date into twenty-three different languages.

It's a Habit with Clarence

WIFE VERSUS SECRETARY, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by Clarence Brown; screen play by Norman Krasna, Alice Duer Miller, John Lee Mahin; produced by Hunt Stromberg; musical score by Herbert Stothart and Edward Ward; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, William A. Horning, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Ray June, ASC; film editor, Frank E. Hull; assistant director, Charles Dorian. Cast: Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, Myrna Loy, May Robson, George Barbier, James Stewart, Hobart Cavanaugh, Tom Dugan, Gilbert Emery.

CLARENCE BROWN was fortunate in having such a strong cast for this picture, but the picture itself was even more fortunate in having Clarence for its director. It is a director's picture. The triangle theme has been worn thin as story material for the screen; there is not a gripping scene, not a tense moment in the picture; neither the story nor the film stresses a point to arrest the attention of the audience, yet *Wife Versus Secretary* is one of the most completely satisfying pictures one could wish for, an achievement vastly to the credit of its director. And it is another success to the credit of its producer, Hunt Stromberg, who seems to have contracted a habit of turning out notable examples of screen entertainment.

I have written often that it is the medium which entertains, that the screen gets its strength more from its method of telling a story than from the story itself. Here we have an uneventful recital of incidents in the lives of three quite ordinary people, woven into a fascinating piece of entertainment by the intelligent realization of the graphic powers of the motion picture camera. The little things in the lives of the characters are made big things to the audience by the method of their presentation. With all the rhythm of a lilting piece of music the picture glides before our eyes, utilizing the ability of the players to make natural and convincing its human elements, the skill of technicians to give it sympathetic pictorial appeal, and the artistic taste of its costume designer to make its women look attractive.

* * *

Certainly no picture ever had a series of smarter looking sets. Cedric Gibbons and his associates outdid themselves in presenting the camera with an opportunity to record last minute effects in modern interiors and the best of taste in their furnishing. Ray June's photography realized all their pictorial possibilities, presenting us with a succession of beautiful pictures which provide a smart background in sympathy with the smart mood of the story.

A refreshing variation of the triangle theme is the fact that the viewpoint of each of the parties to it is reasonable. All three have our sympathy. It is Jean Harlow, the secretary, who heals the breach between Myrna Loy and Clark Gable, the wife and husband. The secretary loves the husband, but she knows the husband and wife love one another, and wittingly does nothing to make either unhappy. That makes it a nice story.

Clark Gable's hold on his public will lose none of its strength by virtue of the performance he contributes to this picture. It is a part of varying moods, one of considerable emotional sweep, gay, grave, dynamic, and in each of its phases Clark is at the peak of his form. I have always liked him on the screen, but never quite so completely as this time.

Jean Harlow, whose habit of wearing crayon crescents for eyebrows annoys me excessively, makes the secretary both human and efficient, that is, as human as one can

be with unhuman eyebrows. Jean's beauty is not quite emphatic enough to stand up under the handicap of obviously artificial trimmings. However, if the eyebrows do not annoy you, you will find her performance satisfactory.

Myrna Loy, as usual, is outstanding. When she throws herself into the arms of her mother-in-law (May Robson) and sobs out her fear that her husband no longer loves her, I almost cried with her. No other actress on the screen outmatches her in ability to reflect completely by mood, gesture and voice, the meaning of each of her scenes. Intelligence is Myrna's greatest asset, and her powers of expression always are at its command. It is a finely drawn characterization she has here, one with its background in monotone, as throughout the picture she is merely the attractive wife of an extremely busy man, but she makes the part a vibrant, impressive one of emotional nuances which run the scale from gaiety to grief.

And again we have James Stewart in a performance which puts under his feet another rung in the ladder to cinematic fame which he most assuredly is destined to climb. His explanation to Jean Harlow of how he secured a raise in pay is a beautiful bit of acting. George Barbier, May Robson, Hobart Cavanaugh, Tom Dugan, Gilbert Emery, and a dozen or so more not listed in the cast have much to do toward making the picture such a satisfactory contribution to the season's entertainment.

The screen play by Norman Krasna, Alice Duer Miller and John Lee Mahin is an extremely logical bit of screen writing. It provides for a nice balancing of parts between the three stars and the showing of each in a favorable light. It is a story of a husband who loves his wife but unwittingly puts too great a strain on her loyalty, which he takes for granted. The picture makes it evident that the script was an excellent one.

Review Goes Round and Round

GENTLE JULIA, 20th-Fox release of Sol M. Wurtzel production. Directed by John Blystone; screen play by Lamar Trotti; based on novel by Booth Tarkington; photography by Ernest Palmer; assistant director, Jasper Blystone; art direction, Duncan Cramer, Albert Hogsett; costumes, Alberto Luza; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Tom Brown, Marsha Hunt, Jackie Searl, Francis Ford, George Meeker, Maurice Murphy, Harry Holman, Myra Marsh, Hattie McDaniel, Jackie Hughes, Eddie Buzard.

SOL WURTZEL is to be commended for giving the children something they will enjoy. I suppose that will be the keynote of all reviews of *Gentle Julia*. It features Jane Withers, a child, has other children in its cast and a majority of its footage is devoted to childish pranks. But commendation of it as a picture that will please children does not imply condemnation of it as one which will bore adults. As a matter of fact, a picture boring to adults will not be pleasing to children.

A perfect example of a piece of screen entertainment we would say was aimed exclusively at children was *Three Little Pigs*. In New York Times Square one night I read that title on marquees of five different theatres, and children do not patronize Broadway houses at night. All Walt Disney's films are really picturized nursery rhymes, yet children get no more enjoyment from them than do their parents. They have elemental appeal, and elementals are not measured in terms of years.

All of us who had young children when screen entertainment was young, gained our first interest in motion pictures because of the insistent demands of the children that we should take them to film theatres. The screen provided children with the first opportunity they had to follow stories told in the elemental language of pictures which moved. Their imaginations translated the pictures into terms they could understand. As you sat by your child and viewed a silent picture, both of you did not get the same story because both imaginations did not function alike, but each got what pleased him most. That is what gave screen entertainment the initial impulse that created the great film industry.

When the screen went talkie it banished the imagination as its main asset and presented an entirely new form of entertainment demanding the functioning of the intellect for its enjoyment. You and your child, not possessing equal intellectual development, no longer could enjoy the same picture, and the screen became a wholly adult form of entertainment except for such films as Disney and his imitators provide. The screen's maximum potential audience must necessarily include children, but the possible maximum will be attained again only to the extent Hollywood's product reverts to its elemental method of story telling, the pictorial method which has universal appeal. Pictures would not have lost the patronage of children if the sound camera from the first had been used only to make audible the printed titles which facilitated the telling of silent stories.

Gentle Julia will appeal to children, not solely because it is mainly about children, but because it is about something children can understand. It is universal entertainment because none of us can grow too old to interpret for our own enjoyment anything children enjoy. The picture pushes back the years and gives us variations of the things we did when we were young. It is good for us to live our youth again even for the brief period of a picture's unreeling, so *Gentle Julia* is a production I can recommend to you for your own enjoyment, and I positively insist you take the children with you when you go to view it. Never mind if there are lessons to be done, if you never allow the children to stay up that late; the youngsters have had lean pickings in the way of pictures since they began to talk the adult language and some consideration is due them.

Gentle Julia belies its name. Julia herself, in the person of the sweet and appealing Marsha Hunt, is a gentle little thing, but Jane Withers, Jackie Searl and the other children are regular little devils who will delight you. It is the second time I have seen Marsha. The first time was in *The Virginia Judge*. I wrote then that she is "a little girl with a charming smile and a turned up nose," and that we would hear from her if her naturalness were not spoiled by training in stage acting. She is a delectable morsel in *Gentle Julia*, as sweet and appealing as a just opened rose, and if she can resist branding by Hollywood's rubber stamp, if she can save her eyebrows from being sacrificed to crayon hand work and her nose from the

Don't overlook reading about the SPECTATOR's *Tenth Birthday Party*. Page. 2.

manipulation of plastic surgeons, she some day will set dollars fluttering their way through the holes in the glass that box-office girls sit behind and sometimes smile at you. If they dare touch Marsha's nose!

Jane Withers is an intelligent youngster and scores a hit in her sympathetic role as the fixer of things which threaten to go wrong. There is too much of a suggestion of acting in what she does, a tendency which should be curbed before her naturalness is sacrificed to it. Jack Blystone's direction is responsible for capable performances by all the members of the cast. George Meeker, as the heavy; Tom Brown, who wins Marsha; Maurice Murphy, an extremely amusing and goofy quoter of poetry; Harry Holman, an irascible grandfather with a heart of gold; Francis Ford, fish peddler, all contribute to one's enjoyment of the picture. Jackie Searl, Hattie McDaniel, and Jackie Hughes are children who will please you greatly.

Lamar Trotti's screen play makes the most of the humor and human feeling in the Booth Tarkington's original, and Blystone's direction is splendid.

Some Pointers for Hollywood

MARIE CHAPDELAINE, a France Film production. From the story by Louis Hemon; directed by Julien Duvivier. Cast: Madeleine Renaud, Suzanne Despres, Maximilienne Max, Gaby Triquet, Jean Gabin, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Andre Bacque, Alexandre Rignault, Thomy Bourdelle, Daniel Mendaille, Fred Barry.

BECAUSE it does so many things which simply cannot be done, this production should have attracted to the Grand International all Hollywooders engaged in the creative branches of picture making. To start with, the story is one that every Hollywood studio would turn down. The male lead, the one the girl loves, dies; it takes her some time to make up her mind whether to marry a presentable young fellow who would take her to live in a city, a city being something she has never seen, or to wed a stalwart woodman and remain for the rest of her life far from towns and cities; the picture fades out on her simple statement to the woodman that she will marry him next spring.

Having the hero die and the heroine promise to marry someone else, cannot be done. Any Hollywood producer could have told those funny Frenchmen that much. And the manner in which Duvivier directs his romance—it is to laugh! The girl does not even hold hands with one of her swains. Anyone in Hollywood could have told the director she should have bestowed long and passionate kisses on all three of them.

Yet despite Duvivier's failure to be governed by the rigid Hollywood cinematic laws, there emerges in *Marie Chapdelaine*, one of the tenderest, sweetest and most compelling love stories ever told on the screen, one told against a background of magnificent scenery, shot in its entirety in its own locale and showing us the four recurring seasons. Never has Hollywood given us finer photography, more impressive compositions or a more comprehensive production.

And Hollywood can learn from this picture how unimportant is most of the dialogue in a talkie. French is used throughout and not as much as five percent of what is said is presented in titles in English superimposed on the screen, yet never for a moment is the thread of the story

obscure. If we can do without hearing ninety-five percent of the dialogue in a foreign picture, surely we can do without a like amount in our own pictures and still maintain the continuity of audience interest.

Duvivier's treatment of dialogue is enlightening. He does not deem it important that the camera should be held on the player reading lines. A great deal of dialogue is heard from off stage, the camera occupying itself with the person or persons concerned in what is said. For instance, we hear secondary characters discussing the three suitors for the girl's hand while the camera shows us only the girl's reaction to what is said. Thus the important story element is kept before us. It is the subject of the discussion, not those engaged in it, which carries the story interest, and the camera eliminates all the extraneous composition which could serve only to distract our attention from the girl.

* * *

Madeleine Renaud's performance also conveys a message to Hollywood. It is a lesson in the power of repression. When with cruel abruptness she learns the man she loves is dead, we have no emotional outburst, no physical evidence of her grief. She is the fortunate possessor of a pair of soulful, expressive eyes, and in them only do we read the degree of sorrow she is suffering. In all her powerfully emotional scenes, in those in which she copes with her perplexing problems and tries to plot her course to their solution, she turns in a "dead pan" to her audience; but her eyes are alive, very much alive, and in their depths there is drama. Gaiety, too, and happiness and humor are registered in them in scenes of a lighter nature. I am afraid we have few actresses in Hollywood who could duplicate the performance of Mlle. Renaud.

Another argument of the *SPECTATOR* which *Marie Chapdelaine* supports is that beauty on the screen has box-office value. Nature is part of the story, whose theme might be expressed as City vs. Country. It presents shots of rivers and lakes, waterfalls and rapids, wooded hills which are small scale models of the majesty of the mountains, forests of stately trees, fields of waving grain and the primitive farm equipment harvesting it. Then we have winter that is winter, the same locale covered with a depth of snow which cuts off the Chapdelaine family from the rest of the world. In the summer Country has the best of the argument but winter makes a powerful plea for City. It is an intelligent use of background and finely conceived realization of the esthetic values of locale woven into the story pattern.

* * *

There is one short speech in the picture which displays the meticulous attention the French producers paid to little details. The leading characters were sent from Paris to northern Quebec which is settled by the descendants of French families which came over three centuries ago. French Canadians speak a patois of their own which bears slight resemblance to Parisian French. I was wondering how Parisian audiences would receive the vernacular of the mother tongue as expressed by the Parisian players, and the patois of those French Canadians who play the minor parts, in a production in which all of them are supposed to be French Canadians; but my curiosity was satisfied by a line which explained the difference as being

due to the greater education of some of the characters. This is nice attention to a little thing which might make a big difference.

Quite a Tidy Job

THE LEATHERNECKS HAVE LANDED, a Republic picture. Supervised by Ken Goldsmith; directed by Howard Bretherton; screen play by Seton I. Miller; original story by Wellyn Totman and James Gruen; photographed by Ernest Miller and Jack Marta; edited by Robert Jahns. Cast: Lew Ayres, Isabel Jewell, Jimmy Ellison, James Burke, J. Carrol Naish, Clay Clement, Maynard Holmes, Ward Bond, Paul Porcasi, Claude King, Christian Rub, Joseph Sawyer, Henry Mowbray, John Webb Dillion, Louis Vincenot, Lal Chand Mehra, Frank Tang, Ray "Crash" Corrigan, Beal Wong, Robert Strange, Victor Wong, Montagu Shaw.

WITH provoking persistency Republic spotted its previews on nights when one, and sometimes two, of the larger organizations gave the press something new to look at, and as a consequence *Leathernecks* is the first of its pictures I have seen. If it is a fair example of the workmanlike manner in which all its products are turned out, the new organization must be making an impression on the market it aims at. It is not a big picture, but it is one of the neatest jobs of picture making I have seen for some time.

Howard Bretherton's interpretation of Seton I. Miller's script is responsible for a swiftly moving drama which holds one's attention on the screen. Bretherton apparently kept his mind on the story and made no effort to develop acting to interest us on its own account. The characters move naturally across the screen, read their lines in conversational tones, and leave us to discover for ourselves the drama latent in the scenes. The story is crowded with situations which would tempt a less capable director to commit the fault of resorting to heroics, to loud dialogue and violent gestures, to emphasize drama inherently dramatic enough in itself to require no stressing.

As a result of the intelligent direction Bretherton gives the well constructed story, we have a picture which will give satisfaction to any audience. It is a story of the United States Marines, an authentic presentation of what a company of this most interesting branch of our defense forces would be expected to do in the situations in which it finds itself. Most of the action takes place in China, and when we consider that the players never got nearer the Chinese Empire than North Hollywood, we must doff our hats to the Republic technical department in recognition of the skill with which it creates the illusion that the picture was actually shot on the other side of the Pacific. Stock shots of Shanghai streets melt into intimate scenes without disturbing the Chinese atmosphere, and the Marines parade against Shanghai backgrounds without suggesting the scenes are the product of tricks played by the camera.

Lew Ayres heads the *Leatherneck* cast. He is a lad whose screen appearances always interest me. Never once have I seen him suggest the actor, and in this respect he might serve as a study for some of the higher salaried people from the stage who wish to increase their proficiency as screen players. He has a pleasing personality, adapts himself to his role, and lets his personality do the rest of it. If you like a nice, clean, good looking American boy, one with a sense of humor and who never seems

to take himself seriously, you will like Lew in any picture in which he appears. For some reason I cannot fathom, the big producers do not seem to regard him as a screen asset. I see him as just the type of boy the public regards with favor.

Isabel Jewel shares with Lew a romance, which, too, might serve as a study for writers and directors who wish to improve the present stereotyped method of depicting love making on the screen. Miller and Bretherton give us something refreshingly new, a romance tender and sweet, and with no lack of strength by virtue of the fact that no kissing is indulged in. The romance is suggested, not depicted. The two do not exchange one endearing term, nor does the boy ask the girl to marry him; but we know when Lew's ship reaches Manila Isabel will be on the dock, waiting for him. It is a thing rare on the screen—a romance presented with the best of taste, one which does not fade out on a vulgar close-up of crushed lips. As Odd McIntyre puts it, "Love is an emotion of seclusion." Hollywood regards it as an emotion for public parading.

Jimmy Ellison is Ayres' pal in *Leathernecks*. Here is another lad who is going places on the screen, who has made himself the favorite player in Harry Sherman's worthy western series. In a year or two the big studios will be after him, but now their search for new talent is being confined to Little Theatres along the Atlantic seaboard. Hollywood is too far away to attract their attention.

Others worthy of mention for good work in *Leathernecks* are James Burke, Carrol Naish, Clay Clement, Maynard Holmes, Ward Bond, Paul Porcasi, Claude King and Christian Rub.

Succession of Quarrels

LOVE BEFORE BREAKFAST, a Universal. Screen play by Herbert Fields; additional dialogue by Gertrude Purcell; sound supervision, Gilbert Kurland; editorial supervision, Maurice Pivar; photographed by Ted Tetzlaff; art director, Albert d'Agostino; film editor, Maurice Wright; assistant director, Phil Karlstein; musical director, Franz Waxman. Cast: Carole Lombard, Preston Foster, Janet Beecher, Cesar Romero, Betty Lawford, Douglas Blackley, Don Briggs, Bert Roach, Andre Beranger, Richard Carle, Ed Barton, Diana Gibson, Joyce Compton.

OF COURSE it is possible that somewhere on earth there is a girl who would prefer drowning to marrying the man she loves, but Universal could not put her in a motion picture and entertain me with it. *Love Before Breakfast* tries to do it, but does not succeed. Carole Lombard never in her screen career gave a better performance, but she is the silly girl the first sentence refers to. She loves Preston Foster to distraction, therefore quarrels violently with him during the entire film, has to be carried against her will from a sinking sailboat, her objection being based on the fact that Foster is rescuing her; harangues with him all the way through their marriage ceremony, and when the picture ends we know they will keep right on quarreling violently for the rest of their lives.

It is an extremely tiresome and silly picture. It is made from Faith Baldwin's *Spinster's Dinner* and because there is no spinster's dinner in the screen version, the picture is called *Love Before Breakfast*, even though there is no breakfast to give meaning to the title.

I may be wrong when I say Carole and Foster quarrel all the way through the film. Somewhere during one of the quarrels I began to think about the big job Bill Le Baron had to get Paramount's production wheels revolving smoothly, and when my mind came back to the picture the two were some place else quarreling about something else, so I suppose they kept it up while I was on my mental visit to Bill.

Walter Lang, who directed, allows his characters to carry on loud dialogue while bumping into other couples

on a dance floor. That is bad direction, showing supposedly intelligent and well bred people carrying on intimate conversations in tones loud enough to be heard by all the dancers on the floor. It is done in many pictures, but never by really efficient directors.

With the exception of that lapse, Lang's direction is very good, but his story material nullifies all his efforts. The picture talks incessantly, but a great deal of background music eases the pain of listening to it but does not condone its many faults.

Reviews by Allan Hersholt

Has Much to Its Credit

MEN WITHOUT LOVE, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by Richard Boleslawski; produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz; screen play by Edward E. Paramore, Jr. and Manuel Seff; from a book by Peter B. Kyne; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, James Havens, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Joseph Ruttenberg, ASC; film editor, Frank Sullivan; assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Cast: Chester Morris, Lewis Stone, Walter Brennan, Irene Hervey, Sidney Toler, Dorothy Tree, Roger Imhoff, Willard Robertson, Robert Livingston, John Sheehan, Joseph Marievsky, Victor Potel, Helen Brown, Harvey Clark, Virginia Brissac, Jean Kirchner.

ALTHOUGH somewhat dubious about the box-office appeal of this, I have no hesitation in classifying it as a worthy production. In but one respect is there cause for adverse criticism of its treatment. It contains more than the necessary amount of talk. Had the dialogue been stripped to its essentials, we would have had the sort of picture the screen should strive for: one with speech only where required to advance the story. There are scenes that would have carried more effectiveness with silence. Had Richard Boleslawski, who directed, been one of those, such as DeMille and Capra, not dominated by studio supervision and therefore able to shoot a script as they see fit, I am sure the film would have reached us with less dialogue.

A Peter B. Kyne novel adapted by Edward Paramore, Jr., and Manuel Seff, *Men Without Love* presents a battle between man and thirst, showing us three humans suffer and slowly die from lack of water. Occurring almost entirely on a desert, it, perhaps, is too stark for popular consumption.

The picture has some fine examples of cinematic art, presenting particularly good dramatic effect created by an intelligent use of the camera, not an uncommon thing for a Boleslawski offering to do. Previously, he has had greater opportunity for a manipulation of light and shade—in *Les Miserables*, for instance. *Men Without Love* treats us to some fascinating outdoor photography, for which Joseph Ruttenberg receives credit. The picture has several shots of the desert, some of them moving, which splendidly bring out the starkness, hopelessness of the place. Boleslawski's direction always reveals a superb knowledge of human emotion. This story has permitted his exercising it more than usually is the case.

The acting is excellent. Chester Morris offers his most notable portrayal, which means it is a magnificent exhibition of intelligent acting. The film is worth seeing for his characterization alone. Lewis Stone has his best role in

some years and does a beautiful job. I can recall viewing Walter Brennan only once before on the screen; the picture was *Barbary Coast* and in it he gave an excellent stage performance. It is an excellent motion picture performance which he gives in *Men Without Love*.

There are some stirringly effective close-ups of Morris, Stone and Brennan, made so by the facial expressions of the three. Dorothy Tree's ability, charm and poise make her, in a small and unimportant part, a highlight of the picture. Irene Hervey is pleasing to both the eye and the intelligence. Roger Imhoff, Sidney Toler, Willard Robertson and John Sheehan are in for brief appearances and do exceptionally well. As is customary in a film directed by Boleslawski, characters who appear briefly with little or nothing to say, display confidence, have conviction and make lasting impressions.

A Propagandic Piece

ROAD GANG, Warnes release of First National production. Supervised by Bryan Foy; directed by Louis King; original story by Abem Finkel and Harold Buckley; screen play, Dalton Trumbo; photographed by L. O'Connell. Cast: Donald Woods, Kay Linaker, Carlyle Moore, Jr., Henry O'Neill, Joseph King, Addison Richards, Joseph Crehan, Charles Middleton, Olin Howland, William Davidson, Harry Cording, Marc Lawrence, Eddie Shubert, Ed anV Sloan, Ed Le Saint, George Lloyd, Tom Wilson, Constantin Romanoff, John Irwin.

HERE we have grim, vital, stimulating views of imprisonment on a Southern penal farm, not unlike the one in *I Am a Fugitive*. Preaching against political crime and barbaric conditions assertedly in existence at some prisons of this country, it is too unpleasant to experience popularity as diversion. But no one, I feel, viewing it can fail to leave the theatre unimpressed by the stupid, brutal prison regulations and system of organized vengeance the production reveals.

The plot is commonplace, a fact which I realized as an afterthought. I have a couple of minor objections to the story, an original by Abem Finkel and Harold Buckley, but they are not of sufficient importance to mention. The characters introduced as convicts, of course are law-breakers, and yet they are human and likeable compared to the prison officials. There is much terror, pity and irony in the picture. It takes us to a prison where the laws, instead of rendering constructive influence in the lives of humanity's weaklings, are employed for their destruction. One feels keenly that *Road Gang* is authentic in its panorama of life at such a place. Never before have prison scenes on the screen stirred me more than did those

in this production. In addition to its great amount of action, the film has much talk—all genuine in realism.

It pleases me to credit Dalton Trumbo with some superb screen writing. If we must have a lot of talk in pictures, there should be more Dalton Trumbos discovered. Particularly fine in his screen play is the dialogue. If *Road Gang*, his first assignment, is any criterion of what we may expect of him in the future, he will be a leader among film writers. I congratulate Warners-First National for providing him with an opportunity of revealing his ability in this line. Many SPECTATOR readers remember him as the author of constructive and entertaining articles which in the past adorned its pages.

Responsible for a masterly directorial job, quite his most notable, is Louis King and for a well-photographed picture is L. W. O'Connell.

Road Gang has successful acting. Donald Woods, in a different role, does splendidly, giving a performance that is rich in sincerity and conviction. Kay Linaker has a part which offers little chance for breadth of appeal; her portrayal at no time strikes a false note. Henry O'Neill and Joseph King, as political leaders, are excellent. King, recently brought from a career of many years before Broadway footlights, never becomes stagey in the film, which is noteworthy, considering that some of his scenes easily could have been played with an unfitting air of the theatre. Marc Lawrence is excellent in a small role. Carlyle Moore, Jr., Joseph Crehan, Olin Howland, Charles Middleton, Addison Richards and William Davidson lend good assistance.

Road Gang is another of the series of well made pictures being produced for Warner Brothers by Bryan Foy.

Recommended Highly

BOULDER DAM, a Warner Bros. picture. Screen play by Sy Bartlett and Ralph Block; based on story by Dan M. Templin; photography by Arthur Todd; supervisor, Sam Bischoff; director, Frank McDonald; ass't. director, Frank Mattison; film editor, Tommy Richards; art director, Hugh Reticker; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music and lyrics by Wrubel and Dixon; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Ross Alexander, Patricia Ellis, Lyle Talbot, Eddie Acuff, Henry O'Neill, Egon Brecher, Eleanor Wesselhoeft, Joseph Crehan, Olin Howland, Wm. Pawley, Ronnie Cosby, George Breakston.

UNQUALIFIEDLY do I recommend this to every adult seeking an intensely diverting hour at the cinema.

It requires no deep thought to realize what principally is responsible for the high success of *Boulder Dam* as screen entertainment. Direction is the thing. I am informed by my memory that Frank McDonald is new to me among film directors. Possessing a sure touch, sensitivity, appreciation of drama and comedy, a sound, sensible grasp of the fundamentals of picture entertainment, he has performed wonders with the material given him. True, he had a finely-wrought script, a group of generally dependable players, a skilled cameraman and interesting backgrounds to work with. But few in his place could have done so brilliantly. His handling of the dramatic situations, the comedy, the atmosphere and the playing has made *Boulder Dam* a fine audience film, one which will command undivided attention from its spectators, one which will make them feel they have received their money's worth.

Not original in its basic idea, the story has been constructed well. Of high order is the dialogue by Sy Bart-

lett and Ralph Block, never unnatural, fitting at all times. *Boulder Dam* has many scenes of spectacular thrills. It is all vividly realistic cinema, told in proper tempo both by the camera and dialogue. I have seen no finer example of how talk and action must be combined to make a splendid talking motion picture. For that alone, it is a notable production.

Ross Alexander has the leading role and does a superb characterization of it, definitely earning stardom for himself. Patricia Ellis offers her initial exhibition of truly intelligent acting. Along with that, she is unusually charming to look at. Lyle Talbot is the villain of the piece, doing excellently. Eddie Acuff has a pleasing personality and is a good comedian. Outstanding work in the film is done by Henry O'Neill, William Pawley, Egon Brecher and Eleanor Wesselhoeft, playing secondary parts. Arthur Todd's photography leaves nothing to be desired. Some good music and lyrics are presented—the work of Allie Wrubel and Mort Dixon.

Above Average Western

DESERT GOLD, a Paramount picture. Producer, Harold Hurley; supervisor, William T. Lackey; director, James Hogan; assistant director, Joseph Youngerman; screen play, Stuart Anthony and Robert Yost; from a novel by Zane Grey; sound, W. H. Oberst; art directors, Hans Dreier and Dave Garber; photographer, George Clemens. Cast: Larry "Buster" Crabbe, Robert Cummings, Marsha Hunt, Tom Keene, Glenn Erikson, Monte Blue, Raymond Hatton, Walter Miller, Frank Mayo, Phillip Morris, Willis Marks, John Merkle, Anders Von Haden, James Burtis, Si Jenks, Ed Thorpe, Billy Bletcher, Bob McKenzie, Gertrude Simpson.

ZANE GREY western stories, both in print and on celluloid, have experienced little popularity with me.

Recently came an assignment to see one at a theatre miles away, requiring an hour's automobile drive in a rainstorm. En route to the preview locale, I vigorously cursed the producers for taking such an offering so far in such weather. Surely I wouldn't enjoy the picture. Well, I did—thoroughly.

Desert Gold was made for the sort of audience I saw it with—a weekend-night gathering of youngsters and grown-ups in a neighborhood house. Apparent it was that the entire film delighted them greatly. Knowing the outcome of its story before the second reel had passed did not in the least lessen my interest, which had been gained almost with the opening scene. The picture has exciting melodrama, highly amusing humor, half a dozen meritorious performances, expert direction, excellent dialogue and it is fine to look at—this combination giving me the firm belief that it is capable of pleasing any audience.

I had not viewed a production directed by James Hogan before this one, in which he reveals good taste, a delicious sense of comedy, human understanding, true knowledge of motion picture tempo and an ability to make his players behave like the characters they are portraying would behave. Little attention usually goes to sound in westerns, most of them being loud enough for a deaf person to hear. In *Desert Gold*, voices are modulated so that they come to us as people generally converse. And bullet shots, of which there are no small amount, do not jar one, a pleasant rarity. There is a wealth of exquisite scenery, beautifully photographed by George Clemens. The Stuart Anthony-Robert Yost screen play is a skilful job.

Brilliant is the characterization given by Raymond Hatton, an actor sadly neglected by producers in recent

years. Robert Cummings, a youthful newcomer, will achieve stardom if his work continues to be of the quality it is in this and was in *The Virginia Judge*, his first, which showed him to be possessed of fine ability for drama. In *Desert Gold*, he succeeds utterly in a broad-comedy portrayal. Marsha Hunt has simple charm and beauty combined with much talent. Tom Keene gives what I con-

sider his first completely fine performance, heretofore having been a bit too unctuous. His work causes my looking forward with genuine interest to his next appearance, which I hope will be in an unusually good role. Larry "Buster" Crabbe, with little to do, and Monte Blue, as the heavy, are very good. *Desert Gold* is a picture you should see.

The New York Spectacle

By
Betsy Beaton

New York, February 24.

A PLAY called *Ethan Frome*, basically from the novel by Edith Wharton, dramatized by Owen Davis and his son Donald, produced by Guthrie McClintic, sets by Broadway's present pet scenic designer, enacted by Pauline Lord as Zeena; Raymond Massey as Ethan Frome; Ruth Gordon as Mattie Silver, knocked this playgoer out of her safe and sane world for some three hours after she saw it. So vibrant, so clean-cut, so smashing a tale was told on the stage of the National theater last Tuesday evening that most critics unanimously declared it one of the greatest plays of its kind in the last decade. Certainly no novel can boast a better stage adaptation.

The story of Ethan Frome, trying to wrest an income from his land; of Zenobia Frome, his tragic, self-centered hypochondriac wife; and of Mattie Silver, Zenobia's homeless cousin who comes to live with them, is one of the most sombre, powerful tragedies of all time. By far the best of the Wharton output, it seems to gain in majesty and realism on the stage, and the final denouement is a most startling scene.

* * *

We saw the opening of the Follies the other night and it turned out to be a much better show than even the last one was. Fanny Brice was as funny as ever, but it was Josephine Baker who proved the sensation of the evening. The dark cyclone stopped the show several times. When she took her curtain calls, she seemed particularly self-effacing, which is always attractive in a performer. Her first entrance is dazzling. She is mounted on the backs of eight ebony men in a provocative white costume. Next she is a Maharani, singing in a piquant, tremulous coloratura. Her last number, the most striking of all, revealed a Baker garbed in silver mesh in a weird, fantastic surrealistic dance. She seemed to imbue her audience with a heady excitement whenever she was on the stage.

The papers the next morning, however, were less enthusiastic than the first-night audience, and the critics limited themselves to a few lackadaisical remarks such as, "An overlauded importation," etc. We cannot agree. Josephine Baker first took Paris by storm in post-war times. Her hair plastered down with tar, she danced about the stage angularly, puffed out her cheeks and dislocated her body. By Robert de Flers her antics were labeled "lamentable transatlantic exhibitionism which brings us back to the monkey much quicker than we descended from the monkey."

This scalding criticism didn't seem to do La Baker much harm, however, as she nightly filled the Folies

Bergeres for many months, put on midnight shows at her own cabaret, went on to new triumphs in Central Europe and married a Continental nobleman. The Josephine Baker of today is more quiet, even more sophisticated... Backstage note: Josephine Baker has a white maid, Fannie Brice has a colored one.

* * *

Harold Hecht, who put on such musicals as *Hullabaloo* at the Pasadena Playhouse, is back here and about to present a new show. It should go over, as Hecht has an unusual feeling for pace. . . . Saw the Charlie Chaplin film and enjoyed it immensely. It seemed to us, however, that he could have done away with several vaguely disturbing titles. For instance, could he not have had a sign over a gate or something of the kind to suggest an orphanage? Since someone discovered that you could portray the transition from spring into winter by the expedient of a shot from the window showing a branch of a tree blossoming, being snowed under, and so forth, I can't help but feel that all titles could be dispensed with in one manner or another. . . . In a small Pennsylvania town, while waiting for a train, I happened to see a picture which featured Noah Beery, Jr. I wonder if anyone else has noticed the amazing resemblance between him and the late Will Rogers. The former seems to have adopted all the mannerisms of the latter, and what's more, he's one of the most pleasing actors I've seen in some time. . . . After seeing *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *Captain Blood* in rapid succession, I am somehow reminded of a story told to me years ago. A Frenchman narrated the tale and claimed it had been handed down in his family from generation to generation. His ancestor, a pirate captain, was captured by a British man-o-war. At noon the next day the captive was ordered up on deck, where his particular fate was to be shot from the mouth of a cannon in the fashionable manner of the period. Before dispatching him the British captain, with a mixture of smug assurance and blunt Anglo-Saxon curiosity, asked the following question of the defiant rogue: "I cannot understand you piratical fools. You fight for filthy money. Why do you not emulate the English, who fight for honor alone?" The pirate turned upon his captor with a graceful leer and said, "I agree with you, monsieur. We each of us fight for that which we do not have. Fire me away, and be damned!"

* * *

We have heard a great deal from the self-styled intellectuals about how motion pictures are stultifying the mind of the masses. It was not, however, until we read *Man, the Unknown* by Dr. Alexis Carrel (who appears to be an authority on everything by virtue of the fact

that he has kept the heart of a chicken alive in a flask for years and years) that we learned what a menace movies have become to the body as well.

We quote: "Each man is characterized by his figure, his way of carrying himself, the aspect of his face. Our outward form expresses the qualities, the powers, of our body and our mind. In a given race, it varies according to the mode of life of the individuals. The man of the Renaissance, whose life was a constant fight, who was exposed continuously to dangers and inclemencies, who was capable of as great an enthusiasm for the discoveries of Galileo as for the masterpieces of Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, did not resemble modern man who lives in a steam-heated apartment, an air-conditioned office, a closed car, who contemplates absurd films. . . . We begin to observe the new types created by motor cars, cinemas, and athletics. Some, more frequent in Latin countries, are characterized by an adipose aspect, flabby tissues, discolored skin, protruding abdomen, thin legs, awkward posture, unintelligent and brutal face. Others appear, especially among Anglo-Saxons, and show broad shoulders, narrow waist, and bird-like cranium."

This is indeed a most alarming state of affairs. It would be well, in fact one might say imperative, for the producers to take heed and raise the quality of their pictures. The masses may deteriorate through watching "absurd films," but this would not interfere with their paying for the privilege; the imminent danger to the film industry lies in the possibility that peoples' bodies may degenerate through viewing bad pictures to the point where they will be unable to drag themselves to the theatres at all. Frankenstein would be annihilated by the monster of his own creation, and even the SPECTATOR would not survive.

* * *

A gentleman by the name of Charles Morgan, London correspondent for the *New York Times*, speaks most frankly and rather alarmingly in an article dated December 27. He explodes a small yet portentous bombshell. I know nothing of Mr. Morgan, yet his article awakened a great curiosity in me as to just what he is like. He begins his piece with a mention of Paul Bourget and his recent death and circuitously, as he admits himself, starts to discuss a play by Barrie, *Peter Pan*.

When speaking of Bourget he mentions the three greatest novels he wrote and the remarkable deterioration in his work after they had been written, and speaks of how English criticism and French criticism differ, the English treating an author's later works with leniency and respect for the "glorious past," while the French criticism is unsparing and relentless. He also speaks of how England piously respects its idols and defends them. Then he mentions *Peter Pan*, the deified lost boy, the English institution.

I quote: "Therefore I say at my peril—and should not say it in these terms if the Atlantic were not comfortably wide—that to me *Peter Pan* is an intensely embarrassing play." Later he says, "His ideal existence is to loiter in perpetual boyhood, refusing growth, rejecting the processes of nature, and, while fixed in his determination to be no-one's father, yearning for his irretrievable mother. That is why the play to me is embarrassing and

perverse. It exalts as an ideal a flat refusal of life itself. It colors with false rainbows and depicts in the line of swaggering courage what is in truth a black, timorous negativism." And he finishes with, "If we ask why the English have taken to their hearts, as if it were true and beautiful, such an ugly piece of sentimentalism, the answer is twofold: first that Puritanism has suppressed but not destroyed a yearning for a female goddess; secondly, that Barrie's special glorification of sexual shrinking and timidity is peculiarly satisfying to the conventional English mind."

Mr. Morgan phrases his thoughts briefly and concisely. They mirror a man who feels he is definitely and finally in the right. That in parading his literal mind before his readers he might come in for criticism and a fair amount of righteous anger, he seems perfectly aware. One cannot help but admire his courage. But, strangely enough, Mr. Morgan aroused no resentment. His article did not incense or irritate me. It made me wonder. If I reacted at all after reading his piece, it was in the calm sure way that a missionary lady might react when, looking over a list of prospects, she finds a heathen worthy of converting into a believer.

Not that I feel like converting Mr. Morgan, nor that I could or would want to. He would have nothing to lose. I would—a wealth of half-forgotten folk-lore, fairy stories, rainstorms, great winds, the unexplored, the mysterious, a nice scent, a very hot day, the great and comforting sense that anything can happen and might, the uncertain realm where recaptured fact leaves off and imagination steps in. I could argue, and argue well, in defense of *Peter Pan* and all he means to me and to thousands of others. But, somehow, I'd rather keep his memory intact, away from disturbing factors, away from Mr. Morgan, away from the black and white print on a paper. He's become a part of me, a smile on my face, a thought flashing through my mind. I was never one to parade my emotions. Let the literary detectives turn their Freudian lenses upon themselves, and leave a little girl her dreams.

Don't overlook reading about the SPECTATOR's *Tenth Birthday Party*. Page. 2.

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